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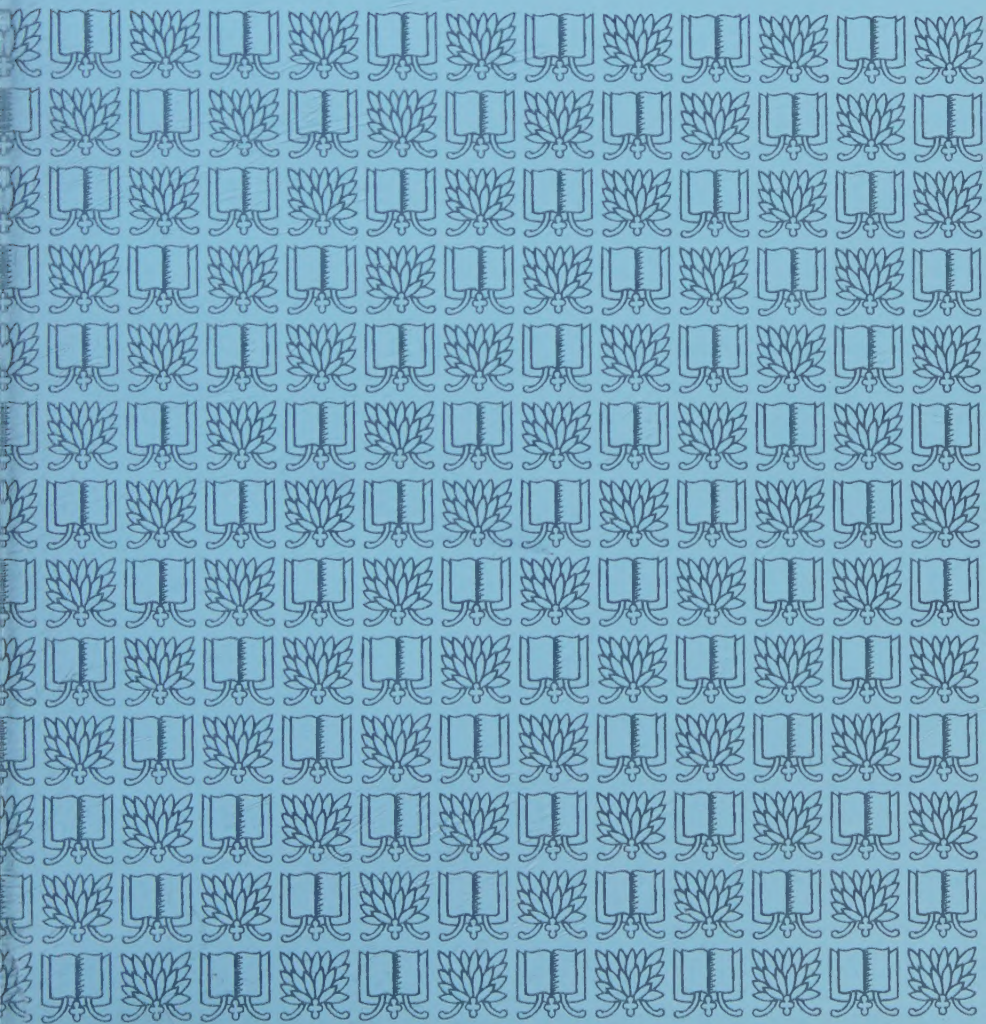
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# IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES



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# **IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES**

**VOLUME 29, ISSUE 1, 2011**

**ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF**

**REV PROF. STANLEY MCIVOR  
B.A.,BD., PH.D**

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**Guest Editor**

**Rev. Principal Patton Taylor MBE.**



## **Pathways of Interpretation: Facing God Without Flinching<sup>1</sup> Or The Elihu Option?**

Rev Dr Mark Gray

This article surveys different methodological approaches to a full-form reading of the Book of Isaiah to see how they address disturbing elements in the character of the divine as encoded in the text. The purpose is to assess the extent to which each methodology adopts what is termed the Elihu option, defined as conforming the text to prior governing dogmatic-theological assumptions. The alternative explored is to face the God of the text without flinching, a reading strategy that brings to the fore dimensions of the text that are characteristically muted or overlooked. The article concludes with observations on how closer attention to the text frees it to be a more significant resource in contexts of pastoral challenge and sensitivity.

### **What Elihu Thought He Knew**

Major biblical figures knew it. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Job and Jeremiah certainly did. The list is not exhaustive. In academic perspective Rudolph Otto knew it.<sup>2</sup> From a more popular viewpoint C. S. Lewis indicated that he knew something of it too when he said that Aslan was not a tame lion. What they all knew is that the character of the divine as encoded in the biblical text has dimensions, which are challenging, disturbing, robust (to say the least) and unjust

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<sup>1</sup>David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 235.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* ([trans. J. W. Harvey] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 17, 26, 27, 31.

(potentially and perhaps). As David Gunn puts it, “God does have a dark side.”<sup>3</sup>

Faced with this aspect of biblical data, many interpreters adopt what may be termed “the Elihu option.” That is, they devise an interpretive strategy that ensures the divine remains immune from question or criticism irrespective of what other voices in the text might say. Elihu is confronted (indeed affronted) by Job’s claim to innocence and his conviction that were he able to summons God to court, God would not have a legal leg to stand on. In response Elihu effectively proposes, “that the Almighty and justice are inseparable and coequal.”<sup>4</sup> For him, “God stands above the Law”: divine justice “can no more be separated from the Deity than can His wisdom or power.”<sup>5</sup> To buttress his case Elihu constructs the composite term “Just-Mighty” for God (Job 34:17), “as if to say the power and justice of God are, in essence, one and the same. Even when God seems totally inaccessible to man and His purposes utterly obscure...Elihu takes it as axiomatic that those obscure purposes must be compatible with justice.”<sup>6</sup>

Among others, a major problem with this approach is that God does not subscribe to it: in Job 42:8, Job’s “friends” are condemned by God but Job is vindicated. Yet the Elihu option is strong in both popular and academic circles across the range of biblical literature.

### **Reading Isaiah Without Elihu**

In this article I will survey methodological approaches to the biblical text—pathways of interpretation—to assess how and why they are influenced by the Elihu option. The primary focus will be a full-form reading of the book of Isaiah, particularly in literary perspective, to

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<sup>3</sup>David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 131.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce Zuckerman, *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 151.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.



see if it better facilitates sensitivity to the nuances of the text, especially as they speak of disturbing elements of the divine character.<sup>7</sup>

Approaching the Bible as literature or “serious entertainment”<sup>8</sup> has the potential of generating more open readings of the text. But old habits die hard. Sometimes despite protestations to the contrary, studies still operate on the *a priori* assumption of God’s justice and righteousness.<sup>9</sup> From this starting point an understanding follows that, as a whole, the book of Isaiah illustrates a “theological plot of divine goodness, human rebellion and subsequent judgment.”<sup>10</sup> Given this governing rubric, of which Elihu would have approved, the relationship between the different sections of Isaiah is designed to explain “the destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, and the post-exilic restoration.”<sup>11</sup>

Against this neat scheme, taking Isaiah as a literary-theological construct, which tackles contentious, difficult, disturbing issues, particularly as the divine may be implicated in them, is not at all to trivialize the text. Rather, it is to engage with and confront it without the easy, unthinking, overly assured and textually distorting certainties of dogmatic theology. The purpose is to probe, examine and illuminate dimensions of the biblical witness that have been toned down or functionally eliminated altogether to conform to

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<sup>7</sup>For violent, exaggerated, possibly excessive aspects of the divine as they are depicted in Isaiah, see 24:1-3; 34:5-6; 49:26; 59:12-20; 63:1-6, to name but a few; for verses, which at face value at least suggest the divine response has been disproportionate to perceived offence, see 40:2; 47:6; 52:5; 54:7; 64:9; 65:6-7.

<sup>8</sup>David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 61.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew Davies, *Double Standards in Isaiah: Re-evaluating Prophetic Ethics and Divine Justice* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 187.

<sup>10</sup>Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>11</sup>Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW 171; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 98-99.

predetermined theological formulations.<sup>12</sup> This is a serious enterprise. It is to face God without flinching.

It may thus be examined whether the strictly applied scheme of human rebellion being met by a fully justified and proportionate divine response is as completely endorsed by the rhetoric of Isaiah as a whole as has often been assumed. In other words, if the prophetic appeals in the first part of Isaiah for the addressees to place their trust solely in God (12:1; 26:4; 30:15; 31:1) can, on the internal rhetoric of Isaiah as a literary-theological work, be shown to be summons to reliance on a divine literary character of some unreliability, then both the overall justness of God is rendered problematic and a reconceiving of the nature of justice, especially in terms of its origin, is made possible.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Function of Judgment and Salvation in Full-Form Isaiah**

Perhaps the central function of the putative pre-exilic prophets is to announce God's word of judgment and woe upon a people irremediably given over to idolatry, covenantal complacency and social injustice. As a result of failing to turn from these sinful ways, the horror of exile occurs. At one level this effectively renders invalid the election of Israel: the "treasured possession" of Exodus 19:5 becomes the "Not my people" of Hosea 2:23. In this configuration, prophetic discourse is closely aligned to the voice and viewpoint of God. It functions to condemn and deconstruct the foundations of the Israelite world.

However, the voice of prophetic condemnation, in a full-form reading, rarely comes in isolation (e.g., the woe oracles of Isaiah 1-39 are followed by the salvation oracles of chapter 40 and

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<sup>12</sup>John Goldingay, "Isaiah 40-55 in the 1990s: Among Other Things, Deconstructing, Mystifying, Intertextual, Socio-critical, and Hearer-Involving," *BibInt* 5, no. 3 (1997): 231, perceives that the text "leaves things open but finds that interpreters want to close them."

<sup>13</sup>See Mark Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).



following). It is therefore possible to explore the rhetorical relationship between these types of materials to examine if the schematic pattern of judgment followed by subsequent restoration grounded in divine mercy is the only or indeed most credible interpretative option available. More significantly, it is also legitimate to interrogate the condemnatory sections of the prophetic works to see if subjecting them to a close reading, in order to assess their inner consistency and coherence in respect of the judgment they announce, sustains the judgment-mercy scheme (i.e., that God is good and reliable, and that therefore God's judgments are by definition just). Evidence to the contrary may indicate ideology at work.

Irrespective of the supposed original *Sitz im Leben* of these oracles, in the final form of the works into which they are integrated, they have undergone a process of redactional shaping. Whatever else they may be, they are part of a post-exilic retrospect and readers/listeners must be attentive to the ways in which they have been designed to explain and legitimate what had already happened.<sup>14</sup> This is to say readers/listeners must be aware of the role of these texts in providing a sufficiently sinful rationale to justify the reality of exile. Therefore, the idea must be entertained that they are a key rhetorical component in a larger mechanism, which of necessity must try to conform history to a predetermined outcome.

But, avoiding the inherent circularity of the Elihu option, there is no reason why, as readers of the Isaianic corpus we must simply accede to this agenda of constructing in the rear-view mirror an historical context commensurate with the punishment of exile.<sup>15</sup> The story encoded in the text may be more complex than divine justness and the appropriateness of exile as a response to obdurate human sinfulness.

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<sup>14</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition*, 24, 98-99.

<sup>15</sup> This may be related to Walter Brueggemann's concept of "Structure Legitimation"; see Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 199), 1-21.



With the shift in scholarship towards accepting the validity of synchronic-thematic interpretations of biblical works in their entirety, there is additional capacity to avoid uncritically accepting both the ideological assumptions inherent in the texts and those imported by readers. Attention to the text, deploying, for example, an element of deconstruction, ensures both sufficient critical distance from the allure of the text on its own terms, and a more independent framework for engaging with the work of other scholars in discussing how pre-existing theological convictions significantly determine what is seen in texts.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Insights and Limitations of Form-Criticism**

No review of the prominence of the theme of divine judgment in the prophetic literature would be complete without consideration of the seminal work of Claus Westermann. He has demonstrated that the judgment oracle is the primary mode of prophetic communication.<sup>17</sup> Through methodologically pursuing a form-critical approach, with its emphasis on establishing the boundaries and integrity of discreet sections of text, he has however avoided the issue of how theologically to understand a God whose core message is one of doom to all the people, oppressors and oppressed alike. Moreover, because it is not part of the analytical agenda of this approach to account for the overall shaping of the work, he has not addressed the

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<sup>16</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21. 20-24 and the 'Death' of the 'Author'," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. Graeme Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 368 suggests that texts should have rights in order to protect them from "interpretative violence" at the hands of those who too aggressively wield deconstruction as a hermeneutical tool; it might be suggested that a type of violence is also visited on the text by those at the other end of the hermeneutical spectrum who effectually excise that which does not fit the required theological agenda. James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM, 1999), 550 evidently has little sympathy with this tendency of conferring rights on texts as if they were humans.

<sup>17</sup>See Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

question of the rhetorical relationships between the pre-eminence of judgment oracles and subsequent salvation oracles.

More attuned to the potential problem of a God who is relentlessly judgmental, and therefore theoretically open to the accusation of acting tyrannically in punishing everyone in a blanket fashion, Patrick Miller has attempted to show that the sentence of doom announced by the prophets is characteristically closely correlated to the sin to which, in his estimation, it is a proportionate response. He concludes that,

"The correlation of sin and punishment while effected by Yahweh is not manifest in a capricious and irrational way unconnected to the nexus of events, as if it were an 'act of God' in the sense that insurance companies use such a term.....There is no trivialization of the notion of judgment in the passages studied."<sup>18</sup>

In this way, Miller defends the integrity of God from accusations of excess: the punishment always fits the crime and the justice of God is maintained.

God is ultimately the guarantor of a just order, the judge of the final court of appeal to which the oppressed and afflicted can confidently turn for redress when the corrupt or inadequate systems of this world fail them.<sup>19</sup> This theme re-emerges in an article in which Miller argues that in the world of the Psalms, "lament is not the last word." Doxology is, for, "The one who praises and gives thanks calls for all to praise and give thanks because of what God has done."<sup>20</sup> The problem of pain and any possible prolonged scrutiny of the character of God are quickly and coercively subsumed into the choir singing of divine goodness and justice, thereby creating the impression that any

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<sup>18</sup>Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), 138.

<sup>19</sup>Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 109-110.

<sup>20</sup>Patrick D. Miller, "The End of the Psalter: A Response to Erich Zenger," *JSOT* 80 (1998): 108.



reluctance to participate in this doxological outpouring indicates a defective human understanding of the way things really are.<sup>21</sup>

Concluding his article, Miller applies this pattern to a section of Isaiah, observing that in Isaiah 12 “we encounter a similar kind of ending to a book within a book that we seem to have in Psalm 145.”<sup>22</sup> In both cases judgment gives way to the proclamation of divine rule through human agency and the promise of salvation through a new exodus. In response the people are now called to sing songs of praises. “Like the movement of the song of thanksgiving, like the movement in Psalm 145, and like the movement in Psalms 145-50, the individual who praises evokes the praise of the many.”<sup>23</sup>

The question is whether the rhetoric of Isaiah, in part or as a whole, supports such a tidy pattern.<sup>24</sup> Further, a related question is whether the evocation of a chorus of praise is as credible as Miller believes: to call for praise is not necessarily to receive it. Indeed, it can be argued that to assume that the call will or should be answered in the affirmative is to be seduced by the rhetoric of the text. More

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<sup>21</sup>This analysis does not adequately take into account, for example, Brueggemann’s critique of the end of the Psalter (*Israel’s Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]), in which he observes that the summons to praise in Psalms 145-150 is characteristically not accompanied by a reason or motivation to praise. On the strength of this, he speculates that these psalms represent an ideological attempt by the Jerusalem elite to induce praise without generating the energy to struggle for justice. In this way, they create acceptance of an unjust status quo, which is claimed to be divinely ordained. Note however, that even in this more shrewd thinking, the justice of God is not impugned. Rather, God (reputedly the liberationist God of the Exodus), is co-opted to serve the agenda of a scheming ruling elite who, manipulate the ancient tradition of a God who wills freedom and justice; again God is functionally absolved from wrongdoing.

<sup>22</sup>Miller, “The End of the Psalter,” 110.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 110; in this quotation, Miller himself acknowledges that Isaiah 1-12 is made up of disparate materials, an observation that in itself begins to undermine all efforts at ordering it according to one interpretative plan.

precisely, this instance, with its underlying theological assumptions, gives hermeneutical primacy to one ideological strand in the interplay of ideas within the dramatic context of the work as a whole.

In *Seek the Lord!* A. Vanlier Hunter presents a bleak picture of the nature of Israelite society when confronted by prophetic calls to mend its sinful ways. For him, the proclamation of judgment is not so much intended as a warning of what will happen if heed is not taken of the prophetic message, but a way of announcing the inevitability of divine retribution. As he puts it, "The prophets have not come at the eleventh hour when a chance, however slight, to change the future still existed, but at the twelfth hour when the judgment, already a foregone conclusion, is beginning to break in."<sup>25</sup> According to him, the pre-exilic prophets are thus not social critics but odd divine spokespersons entrusted with words of unremitting doom. Their pessimism is absolute and unrelieved. When he concludes that, "Perhaps we have not perceived the full and terrible impact of classical judgment prophecy until we realize that a subtle part of the judgment lay in the temporary inefficacy of the repentance to which the people were nevertheless called,"<sup>26</sup> he effectually aligns himself with the school of thought which accepts Israel as unregenerate at this point. However, he does not sufficiently question how people can be justifiably subject to God's anger when it seems the text itself supports the contention that they are of themselves incapable of altering the behaviour that gave rise to it.

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<sup>25</sup>A. Vanlier Hunter, *Seek the Lord! A Study of the Meaning and Function of the Exhortations in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Zephaniah* (Baltimore: St. Mary's Seminary and University, 1982), 278; see also 176-190, 273-280.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 280. Hunter reaches his conclusion by careful form-critical work. Deploying a close reading strategy Gray (*Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, 32-35) raises a similar issue concerning Isa. 1:16-17, when the possibility is introduced that the prophet is calling for a level of reform that cannot be effected and that, moreover, is beyond the prophet himself without divine assistance; questions are thus raised about the integrity not only of the prophet, but also of the God who commissioned and sent him.



## Extending Guilt: The Canonical Coup

Canonical approaches, which have attempted to discern coherence in the final form of prophetic works, also reveal a significant acceptance of the storyline that speaks of Israel's sin and God's justifiable punishment. Brevard Childs, arguing for "a complex process of editing"<sup>27</sup> indicative of a "skilful intertwining of traditions"<sup>28</sup> that highlights the ultimate victory of promise over judgment,<sup>29</sup> offers a summary of his understanding of the message of Isaiah as a whole when he writes that,

"Israel has rebelled against God and become totally estranged. The divine judgment has fallen and the country lies in desolation. Israel tries to appease Yahweh by false worship, but God seeks to woo his people back to himself. He promises that salvation will come and Zion will one day be called a faithful city."<sup>30</sup>

From the perspective of this article, the importance of this thought is not so much that it adheres to the formula of Israel rightly incurring the just punishment of God for sin, but that it extends the theological presuppositions on which it rests throughout the book of Isaiah.

Thus, regarding the view that "has been frequently aired by commentators that Second Isaiah's promise to the exiles was a noble concept, but was actually frustrated because the return of the exiles did not usher in the expected paradise,"<sup>31</sup> Childs proposes that "The discrepancy between what happened after the exile and the prophet's eschatological description of God's will is not a criticism of the truth

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<sup>27</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 330.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>29</sup>Ronald Clements substantially agrees with this assessment that the final form of prophetic works has been redacted around the twin themes of judgment and promise; see "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah," *Int.* 36 (1982), 117-129 and "The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.," *VT* 30 (1980) 421-436.

<sup>30</sup>Childs, *Introduction*, 331.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 327.

of the promise, but rather an indication of how little the exilic community partook of the promised reality.”<sup>32</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Elihu, the honour and trustworthy nature of God are resolutely defended: as the blame for the exile is laid squarely at the feet of the people, so now the blame for the failure of the glorious future envisioned in Isaiah 40-55 to materialize is also laid at their feet. The culture of theological blame, devised to confer absolution on God, becomes operative in all dimensions of the Isaiah corpus, without Childs ever wondering why a people would be so recalcitrant as not to partake of promises so idyllic. If this interpretation is indeed reflective of the narrative of the book, then the issue is raised as to the extent which Isaiah the book is a totalizing text, which finally seeks to coerce rather than persuade its audience into accepting its vision and viewpoint.<sup>33</sup>

Although Childs acknowledges that large portions of Isaiah are made up of poetry, rather than exploring and pondering the subtle, polyvalent nature of that poetry for its possible meanings, he is keen to move on to what he perceives as the unambiguous theological hard-core, “which bears testimony to God’s reality and his coming rule.”<sup>34</sup> Apparently, Childs cannot begin to contemplate a more subversive and questioning aspect of the text, one that can be located within the rhetoric of the text itself, and which is in tension with the text’s more overt and pronounced totalizing tendencies.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>33</sup>As Goldingay, “Isaiah 40-55 in the 1990s,” 237 puts it, “Isaiah 40-55 shouts very loud, and we have laid down and surrendered”; amplifying this, he argues that the reason “why Isaiah 40-55 shouts so loud, why it seeks so hard to manipulate its hearers into compliance” is related to “questions about power. Consciously or unconsciously, texts are written to serve interests of their authors and their communities.”

<sup>34</sup>Childs, *Introduction*, 327.

<sup>35</sup>See Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, 202-206



## Credulous Reading: A Literary Approach

Contemporary literary methodologies in several instances also conform to this act/consequence pattern, which postulates the sin of Israel (act), followed by the righteous punishment of God (consequence). The attendant theological worldview, grounded in the immutable goodness of God, is also therefore accepted. Katherine Pfisterer Darr speaks of “the destruction merited by Israel”<sup>36</sup> and the “just punishment of God’s people.”<sup>37</sup> One of the results of this interpretation is that everybody in Israel must be conceived of as culpable and therefore deserving of divine retribution. So Pfisterer Darr, of a necessity dictated by prior theological commitments, labels “Israel—*all of it*—a rebel from birth”<sup>38</sup> and chillingly delivers the opinion that “God’s children—and especially their leaders—deserve to die.”<sup>39</sup>

Note, however, should be taken of that “especially their leaders,” for it introduces an element of differentiation into the common sinful mass and identifies the ruling elite as more deserving of blame than other sectors of society. From the perspective of social justice, this implicit acknowledgement that the broad tar brush approach in attributing universal guilt might not be the most accurate or sensitive analytical tool does not adequately address the question of why oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, in the end both seemingly warrant equal punishment. It is important to be attentive to who exactly is threatened with what punishment to see if pronouncements of universal condemnation are rhetorically convincing and secure, particularly in light of Isaiah’s widely recognized concern with justice.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision and the Family of God* (LCBI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 62.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 68 (*italics in original*).

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>40</sup>See Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, 118-178

Parallel to this divided consciousness, which seems uncertain of whether to apportion blame to all or to the rulers, Pfisterer Darr at one stage imagines Israel as a whole as an embodiment of the rebellious son of the book of Deuteronomy. She concludes that "If, as Deut 21:21 states, the disobedient son's offences justify capital punishment, then Israel is no less deserving of death."<sup>41</sup> Yet later, clearly still with the rebellious son of Deuteronomy in mind, she also says "Jerusalem's intemperate, oppressive rulers are spoiled, headstrong children who stand sorely in need of harsh discipline."<sup>42</sup> To pick the former of these options and follow the majority opinion in regarding all of Israel as deserving of punishment (though perhaps accepting that the rich deserve it more than the poor), is fundamentally to maintain the justice of God; to seriously struggle with how, in a situation of injustice, everybody is to be equally condemned, is to entertain doubt about the justice of God and to wonder, in a variation of Psalm 94:20 if God is allied with corruption, bringing misery by God's decrees.<sup>43</sup>

Like Elihu, many interpreters too readily take the side of God against humanity. But perhaps, in terms of the familial metaphor used by Isaiah, if Yahweh can be shown to be not only a husband, but an abusive husband, then the negative perception of Israel's rebellion

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<sup>41</sup>Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God*, 69. Note, however, that whereas in Deuteronomy independent arbitration, in the form of the village elders, is given on the father/son dispute, in Isaiah, if Pfisterer Darr's analogy is accepted, God-the-father-figure effectually becomes judge and jury in his dispute with his son Israel. There is no independent arbitration and this gives rise to justifiable suspicion, especially in relation to the issue of the justice of God.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>43</sup>During the Korean War, U. S. troops massacred all the Korean peasants in a designated area in order to be certain of eliminating (punishing?) possible communist agents, whom they regarded as an enemy worthy of death: as the justice of the U. S. service personnel, and the regime of which they were a part, must be called into question, so too must the justice of God, if a comparable pattern is evident in the thought world of Isaiah.



calls for re-evaluation: Pfisterer Darr's family of God may be more theologically dysfunctional than she cares to admit.

### **The Language of Divine Violence: Contemporary Insights**

In a departure from the theological mechanisms deployed to ensure that God's justice is ultimately never impugned, Gracia Fay Bouwman Ellwood breaks new ground by examining the biblical text to see if the language it uses reflects a dispassionate account of crime committed and proportionate punishment duly delivered. Following the established pattern of observing Israel's sin being met by divine response, she notes that,

"The prophets and historians describe a prolonged period.....of a build up of tension due to Israel's affairs with Baal.....and alliances with foreign governments. They show Yahweh finally lashing out at his unfaithful wife.....in the attacks of Assyria and Babylon, and the captivities that followed."<sup>44</sup>

The original contribution in this, of which the use of the phrase "lashing out" forms a part, is that she is prepared to follow the contours of the biblical language, without too quickly moving to sanitize or rationalize it in order to justify God. As a result she is open to pondering the implications of the darker side of the divine as encoded in the text.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, she perceives that "the Sacred Marriage" metaphor, according to the biblical rhetoric itself, is imbued with "the quality of overkill.....Sadistic tortures are employed" and "Murder is threatened."<sup>45</sup> Attention to text rather than conformity of text to theological presuppositions, as in the framework devised by Elihu, raises the possibility of acknowledging disturbing traits within the divine character which do not sit easily with the concept of God's justice. Using insights gained from recent

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<sup>44</sup>Gracia Fay Bouwman Ellwood, *Batter My Heart*, (Wallingford, Penn.: Pendle Hill Publications, 1988), 6-7.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

research into different types of violent marriages, Ellwood draws parallels to the biblical depiction of God. She concludes that "Yahweh.....is a destructive, pathologically disturbed individual."<sup>46</sup> She acknowledges that "Some may hesitate to accept" this assessment because, in portraying Israel as "an innocent victim.....it seems to do away with the reality of human guilt."<sup>47</sup> Whatever the merits of this, the converse point has to be put, that even if Israel is partially—or indeed totally guilty—this does not justify or satisfactorily account for punishment that is cruel and excessive: Israel's guilt or innocence does not absolve God of abuse.

Ellwood identifies, in a way germane to the exploration of social justice in Isaiah, how the biblical rhetoric, taken seriously on its own terms, gives rise to unease when she argues,

"In so far as the prophetic critique denounces Israel for social exploitation and abuse, we have a somewhat different matter. Few would wish to deny that the abuse of the poor in the days of the prophets.....was a great evil, that it incurred guilt, and that outrage was an appropriate reaction to it. What is unacceptable and abhorrent is imaging these social evils as the acts of the rebellious child or insubordinate wife justly incurring the violence of the husband and father in the attacks of Assyria and Babylon. Considering that the chief oppressors were in fact husbands/fathers, the prophets have turned the natural image upside down when they metaphorically blame the two oppressed classes."<sup>48</sup>

Further confirming that it is appropriate to question whether an all-encompassing collective punishment is just or not, she notes, "It is obvious that the violent attacks of Assyria and Babylon fell upon Baal-worshipper and loyal Yahwist alike. On the level of metaphor, Yahweh's jealous rage blinded him so totally that he could not distinguish guilt from innocence."<sup>49</sup> Essentially Ellwood here

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 11.

underscores that, "The violence of Assyria and Babylon, though striking with particular venom at the powerful, also destroyed many defenseless and innocent [people]." <sup>50</sup>

If it is found convincing, to put the matter judiciously, that the presentation of the character of God in certain sections of the prophets is problematic and may indicate hitherto ignored evidence of abuse, then as Ellwood contends, "we cannot take the batterer simply at his own self-evaluation."<sup>51</sup> This is to say, that it is necessary to resist being mesmerized by the biblical rhetoric like rabbits captivated by the headlights of an oncoming car. The rhetoric must be examined closely both to clarify precisely what it is saying and to see if some of the biblical writers are in fact more open to radical ideas than some scholars are capable of being, with their Elihu mindset. In this instance, the issue is not immediately jumping to the defense of the notion of the justice of God, but evaluating whether a biblical writer can plausibly deploy the language of abuse and still credibly present God as ultimately acting in a just and appropriate manner.

Renita Weems acknowledges the importance of Ellwood in the development of her thinking,<sup>52</sup> before building on the insights of *Batter My Heart*.<sup>53</sup> Firstly, she offers a reason for the prophetic utilization of sexually graphic imagery, arguing that it was a rhetorical device to capture the attention of a predominantly male

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>52</sup>Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and, Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (OBT. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), xiii.

<sup>53</sup>In addition to the work of Ellwood, for studies devoted to problematic texts, see also: PhyllisTrible, *Texts of Terror* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987); idem., *Murder and Difference* ([trans. M. Gumpert] Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988); more generally, see Carol Newsome and Sharon Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), esp. Kathleen O'Connor, "Jeremiah," 169-177 and T. Frymer-Kensky, "Deuteronomy," 55, for her analysis of 'innah, the Hebrew word for abuse.



audience.<sup>54</sup> She suggests that, "The portrait of the sexually loose woman struck at the heart of two of the most cherished and sentimentalized institutions in Hebrew patriarchal culture: marriage and family."<sup>55</sup> The intention of the rhetoric, given the analogy between God as the husband and Israel as the wayward wife, was to get men to imaginatively place themselves in a context where they clearly understood who was in the wrong. In this way the rhetoric becomes a vehicle "for evaluating the public activities of men in the cult and palace."<sup>56</sup> If, as expected, their outlook on life led them to condemn the wanton and support her husband's punishment of her, they were effectually condemning themselves in terms of the metaphor constructed by the prophetic discourse. The purpose of the disturbing imagery was to arrest a male audience,<sup>57</sup> thereby getting it to view its behaviour in a shockingly novel way in order consequently to amend it.

It may be argued, however, that faced with imagery too explicit or too filled with invective, either at the level of metaphor or, in the case of Isaiah 5, directed towards actual women, men might well have rejected the prophetic rhetoric, especially if, in the case of actual female referents, they felt that it was directed against *their* wives; so much for getting a hearing. Furthermore, the thrust of this overall explanation diminishes the offensive nature of the language used by saying that it is really only a way of talking about something else.

Secondly, in relation to rhetorical methodology, Weems helpfully suggests that in communication one should be willing to suspend "one's own opinions until one has had the opportunity to hear a speaker out," a process that involves being "willing to share the value systems the prophets operate within."<sup>58</sup> Allied with her interest

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<sup>54</sup>Weems, *Battered Love*, 3.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

in rhetoric,<sup>59</sup> this results in evaluation of prophetic works being based on close attention to what is said. Given however that as “we have neither within the Old Testament nor external to the Old Testament any explicit information about the assumptions that underlie Hebrew rhetoric” and that therefore “we are forced to rely on the literature of the Old Testament to help illuminate principles behind Hebrew rhetoric,”<sup>60</sup> the text must be read carefully, without necessarily acceding to its ideology. As Weems notes, “One may in the end roundly reject the prophets’ argument...but to do that one must first hear the argument out.”<sup>61</sup>

Thus Weems develops a reading strategy that is both open to the text and critical of it. Deploying this strategy, she recognises that one of the intentions of the prophetic discourse, through using marital imagery to demonstrate that there was “legitimate cause for outrage and retaliation” on the part of the divine husband, is to rationalise “the just nature of God’s punishment of Israel.”<sup>62</sup> Pursuing this thought, she reasons that “God...is not a harsh, cruel, vindictive husband who threatens and beats his wife simply because he has the power to do so. He is himself a victim, because he has been driven to extreme measures by a wife who has again and again dishonoured him.”<sup>63</sup> On an equally understanding note, she later adds that, “God in the end is as much a victim as Israel is...when Israel is punished God suffers as much as Israel suffers.”<sup>64</sup> Since, though, God was responsible for the punishment of Israel through controlling the geo-political forces that led to exile, this sounds as unconvincing as the “This is going to hurt me as much as it is going to hurt you” line.

This more skeptical perspective is present in Weems’ study, especially as she struggles with how God’s harsh punishment of Israel impacts an understanding of God’s character. Perhaps

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., see e.g., 6, 15, 66, 85.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 77.

reflective of the difficulty of the subject, she contends, "Although [the prophets] went to great lengths to insist that Israel's punishment corresponded to Israel's actions, they did not deny the fact that sometimes the punishment was exceedingly cruel."<sup>65</sup> The inclusion of that "exceedingly" strictly speaking indicates that in certain instances Israel's punishment did not in fact exactly correspond to Israel's actions, but exceeded what was merited. In a similarly dissimulating way, she observes that, "Without the analogy of marital love, the interpreters of Israel's theological traditions were hard pressed to explain what sometimes must have *felt like* the unpredictably abusing side of God."<sup>66</sup>

Occasionally though, Weems breaks free of semantic incongruity and recourse to the language of appearance to come clean "that Israel's history had shown repeatedly that God was as capable of being abusive as God was of being compassionate,"<sup>67</sup> and that "the punishment meted out to Israel sometimes exceeded the crime."<sup>68</sup> Strangely, however, given this potentially cathartic moment of truth telling, we are immediately asked to believe that "God's abuse and unpredictability were not to be construed as defects in God's character."<sup>69</sup>

Positive despite her doubts, Weems asserts that, "however one might take exception to the image of God as abusive and destructive, one must commend Israel for its courage to grapple with the dark side of human history, the dark side of God, and the dark side of intimacy."<sup>70</sup> Perhaps so, but it is also legitimate to wonder how slipping back into blaming Israel for its fate, as happens when Weems argues that "Israel was destroyed not simply because God was unpredictable, but chiefly because Israel had transgressed God's

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 71 (emphasis added).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 82.



covenant...God was unpredictable, but Israel was stubborn”<sup>71</sup> furthers “the unfinished agenda of liberation scholarship”<sup>72</sup> mentioned at the outset of her work.

No matter, however, what reservations one might have about how Weems resolves disturbing aspects of God’s character, it needs to be stressed that she validates the requirement to struggle with the entirety of the divine characterization, inclusive of abusive and violent dimensions, as encoded in prophetic rhetoric. The Elihu bolthole of assured governing theological formulations that do a disservice to the text will not suffice.

### **Facing the God of the Text**

The work of David Blumenthal is important for how it approaches the characterization of God. Of particular relevance is his combination of the concept of divine personality made accessible through the biblical text with an acute sensitivity to textually mediated indications that God at times might be other than “fair.”<sup>73</sup> Against the Jewish medieval notion that God is so absolutely different from anything humanly conceivable that nothing can essentially be said of the divine character, Blumenthal argues that God has certain attributes made available to humanity through “the evidence of Scripture and tradition,” and also as “the result of logic.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, God has a “personality” which “is portrayed by the tradition in its texts.”<sup>75</sup> As he observes,

“God, as understood by the personalist stream of the tradition and experience, is personal. So God too must have a character,

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>73</sup>Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God*, 15; this is the term he favours rather than “just,” which he considers too strong. As he notes, “God must act fairly, appropriately punishing the wicked.....and appropriately rewarding the faithful”; for him, problems arise when the divine departs from this sense of fairness.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 13.

sensitivities, an individual history, and a moral capacity. These together identify God as a distinct person. The purpose of theology is to get to know this holy person, God.”<sup>76</sup>

A way to do this is through a close examination of the texts in which the personality of God is encoded.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Blumenthal endorses the methodological approach to theology which grounds reflection on the divine nature in paying close attention to the God rendered in the pluravocity of the biblical word.

Faithful and relentless adherence to this methodology leads Blumenthal to confront the totality of the biblical divine character “without flinching” and without deploying the kind of Elihu defense mechanisms characteristically used when accusations of wrongdoing are made against God. He rejects all attempts to sanitize or explain away problematic aspects of the divine personality on the basis of prior theological convictions,<sup>78</sup> importantly arguing that, “We cannot understand God (or ourselves) if we censor out what we do not like, or what we would like not to see. The texts on God’s abusiveness are there. To censor them out because they are not ‘ethical’ is to limit our understanding of the complexity of human and divine existence.”<sup>79</sup>

Emphasizing that this approach is not a faddish denigration of God in order to reject the divine (something Blumenthal opposes),<sup>80</sup> but a necessary constituent part of an authentic search for healing and justice in the world, rooted in speaking the truth about God, he makes the appeal that “We must break the conspiracy of silence [about God] and tell the truth,”<sup>81</sup> even though sometimes that truth “is awesome; sometimes it is awful. But we owe it to one another, to

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 14-20 on the “Six Personalist Attributes of God.”

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 243.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 238 states “I accept also the rule that one cannot reject God”; see also 262.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 249.

the tradition, and to God to speak the truth and to let the truth stand, unmitigated by our anxiety and our dreams—even if the truth is heretical by community standards.”<sup>82</sup> In keeping with the concerns of this article, primacy is given to the biblical text for what has usually been marginalized within it or excluded from interpretation of it, rather than to the strata of theological overlay by which it has been interpreted.

Blumenthal concludes “that Scripture does indeed portray God as an abusing person; that God, as agent in our sacred texts, does indeed act abusively; that God, as described in the Bible, acts like an abusing male: husband, father, and lord.”<sup>83</sup> Softening the starkness of this position he adds,

*“God is abusive, but not always.* God, as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans throughout the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term ‘abusive.’ In this mode, God allows the innocent to suffer.”<sup>84</sup>

In consequence, the biblically based potential for God to indulge in excessive violence (of which the punishment of exile may be an example) necessitates a re-examination and re-evaluation of the sources and nature of justice in the Isaianic corpus. New lines of thinking about the concept of justice are thus opened and endorsed, especially if it can be illustrated that the final redactors of Isaiah understood that one of their tasks was to try to account for the actions of a God whose behaviour, in certain quarters, was believed to have been excessive.<sup>85</sup> The subversion of the theological model that attributes all justice to God and all guilt to Israel, and which, further, understands God’s punishment of Israel as proportionate and appropriate, encourages readings which are more sensitive to the drama of the text.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 247 (*italics in original*).

<sup>85</sup>See Gray, *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*, 235-265



Related to this, mention ought to be made of the study of Isaiah 34-35 by Peter Miscall<sup>86</sup> for the way it questions old assumptions and encourages approaching the Isaianic corpus more attentively attuned to what the text actually says rather than to what prior theological commitments lead us to suppose it says.<sup>87</sup> Building on the work of scholars who have started to read the Bible as an example of fantastic literature,<sup>88</sup> he argues that his approach represents “a deliberate turn from the religious and theological dichotomies of righteousness and sin and the salvation and judgment to which they lead.”<sup>89</sup> Effectually he thus eschews initially understanding the text in theological categories and instead opts for a reading strategy that stresses the polyvalent and allusive<sup>90</sup> as a way of bringing out dimensions normally suppressed or overlooked. In this way, never making claims beyond what the text itself permits, he demonstrates that scholarship which views Isaiah 34-35 “as an example of a general prophetic pattern of judgment on the nations and salvation for Israel”<sup>91</sup> is too schematic, too theological and too restrictive.

After subjecting the text to a close reading, however, Miscall does raise some pertinent theological questions, particularly with regard to the justice of God. Noting how commentators are keen to find justification for divine rage,<sup>92</sup> providing the usual theological motivations to absolve God from charges of wrongdoing even when the text does not mention them,<sup>93</sup> he contests that none is given and

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<sup>86</sup>Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah 34-35: A Nightmare/A Dream* (JSOTSup 281; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 39 indicates that too often, on the basis of theological presuppositions, we “assume that we already know what the text is saying.”

<sup>88</sup>See George Aichele and Tina Pippin, eds., *The Monstrous and the Unspeakable: The Bible as Fantastic Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>89</sup>Peter D. Miscall, “Isaiah: Dreams and Nightmares, Fantasy and Horror,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 8 (1997): 151-169

<sup>90</sup>Miscall, *Isaiah 34-35*, 24, 62-63, 69, 120.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 65, 67.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

concludes that if one of the purposes of the Isaiah scroll is to elicit allegiance to God on the part of hearers (of whatever time or place), then this “is not a simple affirmation,”<sup>94</sup> for the God encoded in the text is untamed and decidedly problematic. As he asks, “If YHWH can step outside justice to choose a people as his own, does he also move beyond justice at the other extreme to destroy innocent people in unbridled wrath?”<sup>95</sup> Pressing home the point, he further asks, “If YHWH can be merciful and compassionate without moral motivation, can’t he also be brutal and wrathful without moral motivation? (I note that Job would answer this with a resounding Yes!)”<sup>96</sup>

Miscall avowedly interprets to “unsettle our reading of the manifest text.”<sup>97</sup> In this he is successful. He further highlights the need to approach the text with sharp eyes and a minimum of doctrinal overlay in order to be appreciative of its inherent disturbing subtlety. In particular, he demonstrates that if cherished theological certitudes derived from old paradigms of interpretation (such as that of sin and punishment grounded in the idea of the immutable justice of God) are dispensed with because they do not in fact find the support in the text that was once supposed, then the whole issue of the Isaianic presentation of justice needs to be rethought.

Meshing a close reading strategy with an interest in the character of God, Walter Brueggemann argues that the data we have as a resource for reflection on the nature of the divine is the biblical text in which God is exclusively located. Placing his work in the contemporary academic context, he notes that “Our postmodern situation, which refuses to acknowledge a settled essence behind our pluralistic claims, must make a major and intentional investment in the practice of rhetoric, for the shape of reality finally depends on the power of

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 122.

speech.”<sup>98</sup> Applying this type of thinking specifically to Old Testament theology, he contends that “speech constitutes reality, and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites or, derivatively, the utterance of the text.”<sup>99</sup> Nailing his colours firmly to the rhetorical mast, he says “*I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text and in no other way.*”<sup>100</sup> For Brueggemann, as regards “Old Testament faith, *the utterance is everything,*”<sup>101</sup> and consequently “Yahweh Fully Uttered” in essence represents “a presentation of the character of Yahweh”<sup>102</sup> which in all its complexity and difficulty has to be dealt with. Notwithstanding reservations about Brueggemann’s approach,<sup>103</sup> it makes a significant contribution towards endorsing

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<sup>98</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 71.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 66 (italics in original).

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 122 (italics in original); note how Norman Gottwald, “Rhetorical, Historical, and Ontological Counterpoints in Doing Old Testament Theology,” in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, eds., *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 16 challenges the absoluteness of this position by observing that Brueggemann himself accepts the historicity of the exile (however this is understood) as the shaping reality for some of Israel’s most intense and daring theological formulations. Gottwald further observes, in respect of the connection between rhetoric and ontology that he “would venture to say that the only time we are willing to risk is when rhetoric is felt to correspond to or reverberate with a history that we are helping to make and an ontology that gives us a sense of what is most assuredly and reliably real” (21).

<sup>102</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 267.

<sup>103</sup>James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM, 1999), 547 identifies a downside to adopting a rhetorical approach. He suggests that “Brueggemann seems blind” to the fact “that rhetoric is *despised*” [italics in original] because “very suddenly there comes a moment when one says ‘It’s only rhetoric’. There is nothing behind it.” It may be suggested that while this represents a certain popular understanding of rhetoric, it fails to fully appreciate the linguistic and philosophical basis for the rhetorical approach. Furthermore, in an



and legitimating careful study of the divine rendered in the world created by the text. This is the primary source of theological articulation, comprised of both constructive and critical dimensions, which is to say, aspects that support the idea of God's justice and aspects that questioningly subvert it.

### **Human Sin: The Central Paradigm of Western Theology**

As the history of biblical interpretation has unfolded, it may be argued that Elihu has increasingly found himself in august and elevated theological company. Indeed, the fundamental underpinning elements of his system—that God is always just and people always get what they deserve—have been endorsed by and incorporated into the work of hugely influential thinkers.

In a profound way, that the narrative of God's righteousness (*iustitia Dei*, in Martin Luther's phrase) and human sinfulness, fully warranting punishment, should, in variant form(s), play a significant role in a swathe of Old Testament interpretation, is not surprising. It is one that has dominated Western theology since the time of Augustine,<sup>104</sup> with his concept of humanity's "total depravity."

Echoing the importance of just divine punishment, Luther understands the event of the cross as "God fighting with God" (*Gott mit Gott*),<sup>105</sup> by which he means that within God's very being, the God of love is struggling with the God of wrath, who would be perfectly justified sentencing sinners to death. In the modern era, Karl Barth has asserted how God and humanity are fundamentally

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important sense, this attitude prejudges the issue of whether the rhetoric is artistically convincing or not, as determined by methodologically critical standards.

<sup>104</sup>As Jacques Pohier, *God in Fragments* ([trans. John Bowden] London: SCM, 1985), 224 observes, "St Augustine was what one might dare to call a master where sin was concerned," bequeathing to us "a theology of sin which was to weigh heavily.....on all the later development of Western Christianity."

<sup>105</sup>Martin Luther, *Samtliche Werke* (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883), 45: 370.

opposed on account of human sinfulness.<sup>106</sup> He has also insisted that Israel's history is best described as one of disobedience and rebellion against God's covenant.<sup>107</sup> This is not to argue that biblical interpreters have deliberately conformed their thought to this schema (though, undoubtedly some have). It is rather to suggest that a sophisticated version of the Elihu option has been such an important paradigm in Western theology that its validity, function and relevance have been virtually unquestioned. It significantly defines the worldview of biblical theology and has thus exercised a pervasive and extensive influence.

Recent scholarship, however, has begun to erode this Augustinian consensus.<sup>108</sup> Fredrik Lindström argues that the idea of human sinfulness is inadequate as an explanation for all human suffering because in a significant number of cases in the Psalms of complaint, human innocence is assumed.<sup>109</sup> Thus it will not do to attribute every evil in the world ultimately to "original sin." More broadly, Kendall Soulen discusses the way in which the standard doctrinal formula of God rescuing an endlessly sinful human race (culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the exemplary model of this pattern of thought), insufficiently deals with all the biblical data.<sup>110</sup> He proposes that the proper horizon of biblical theology is not the story of salvation (often narrowed even further to the story of personal salvation), but consummation, in the creation of shalom and social justice.

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<sup>106</sup>Karl Barth, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM, 1962), 190 and passim.

<sup>107</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), II/2, 195 and passim.

<sup>108</sup>Pohier, *God in Fragments*, 24 terms it "the Augustinian variant of Christianity."

<sup>109</sup>See Fredrik Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1994).

<sup>110</sup>See Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

## **Conclusion: Beyond the Elihu Option**

This article is dedicated to Professor Stanley McIvor. In his professional life he was a scholar of the biblical text and it is therefore appropriate that I explore pathways of interpretation in academic perspective. As a teacher in a denominational institution—Union Theological College of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland—implicitly or explicitly he also prepared students for the ordained ministry to encounter often-difficult pastoral situations in the light of scripture.

Beyond purely academic propositions and considerations, the books of Job and Isaiah arise from pastoral contexts. “Comfort, comfort my people” says the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:1). Job suffers because of a wager in the Divine Council and with limited knowledge his visitors try to explain why according to their theological lights. Ministers follow in this pastoral tradition. They are perhaps more likely to start out thinking they have the answer to every problem contained in their doctrinal formulations. But lived experience invariably throws up examples of hurt that do not conform to orderly theological schemes and leave questions to ponder, sometimes forever.

How do you help a mother who has buried her third son in three years make theological sense of what has happened? The first has died as a consequence of an insatiable appetite for food and drink, and the second from a wasting motorneurone disease. The third hangs himself.

What do you say to a person of Christian faith who says they find it difficult to trust God on account of the pit they are in as a result of depression and anxiety? A minister has told her she needs to get rid of an evil spirit in her.

A young woman suffers from chronic arthritis. Her minister tells her during a pastoral visit that her suffering comes from sin. Her brother hears this theological diagnosis only years later. Had he learnt it at the time he says he would have hit the minister.



A minister is off with stress. He is advised by a Christian counseling service to get help, but to get it from a secular counseling agency. It will not make the link between sin and his situation. This is wise, but surely we have the resources in the Bible and within the community of faith to bring such matters to resolution, with sensitivity and without recourse to a crude Elihu approach.

It is no coincidence Elihu has the confidence of youth (Job 32:6). But what he thought he knew is inadequate. Whatever the pitfalls, problems and theological challenges of alternatives, we must, to take our own primary texts seriously, face the God of the text without flinching.

**Rev Dr Mark Gray**

*The Calls and the Expectations of Wisdom towards her  
Audience in Proverbs 1-9 (Part one)*<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

*“The two things which have the greatest influence in a state, - namely, the greatest interest, and eloquence, are both making against us at the present moment; and while I am awed by the one, O Caius Aquillius, I am in fear of the other. . . .”*<sup>2</sup>

In Prov 1-9 the way in which the audience is supposed to distinguish between the contending voices of Wisdom and her counterparts is by means of differentiation between their competing voices.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is commendable to examine the calls of Wisdom in relation to that of her counterparts. This is important, since it may function as means to substantiate a valid connection between Wisdom and her counterparts and their speeches. Nevertheless, it also helps to notice the differences as well.<sup>4</sup> I would suggest that the two main differences between Wisdom’s calls and that of her counterparts are

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<sup>1</sup> It is a tremendous honour for me to be able to present this article for the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of the distinguished professor and scholar Stanley McIvor, whom I had the great privilege of knowing personally.

<sup>2</sup> C. D. Yonge, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero Vol. I. Orations For Quintius, Sextus Roscius, Quintus Roscius, Quintus Roscius, Against Quintus, Caecilius, and Against Verres* (London: Georger Bell & Sons, 1909), 1.

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Aletti, “Séduction et parole en Proverbes I-IX,” *VT* 27 (1977): 133; Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 81-2.

<sup>4</sup> I think it is essential to highlight these differences just as Weeks deemed it important to highlight the differences between the Strange Woman and Folly, see further Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 147.

emphasized by the way in which Wisdom reveals herself and expects the audience to perform something in turn to the issuing of her call.

***The Calls of Wisdom in Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36 and 9:1-6 Compared to the Calls of Her Counterparts in Proverbs 1-9***

The competition and contrast between the different calls characterizes Prov 1-9 as a whole. The most prominent call is uttered by Wisdom, which is in competition and opposition with the call of the Strange Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) in Prov 2:16 and 7:5 (her speech in 7:14-20) and that of Folly (אִשָּׁה כְּסִילִית) in 9:13-18.<sup>5</sup> As noted by

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<sup>5</sup>Achim Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9: Der Weisheit neue Kleider* (BZAW 291; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 4-5. “Wer die Fremde Frau hauptsächlich aus ihrem Kontext in Prov 1-9 her begreift, wird sie in Opposition zur Frau Weisheit ebenfalls als Personifikation sehen. . . . in diesem Gegensatz sieht die Fremde Frau parallel zu den Bösen Buben. Die Fremde Frau personifiziert dann eine bestimmte falsche Lehre; dies hatte z.B. schon Ph. Melancthon (1524) im Gefolge der traditionellen Auslegung vertreten. Diese falsche Lehre kann der hellenistische Geist, die Torheit oder sonst etwas Schlechtes sein. . . . Sieht Melancthon die Fremde Frau noch in Opposition zu der Lehre Gottes, so ist ihr Gegensatz zur Frau Weisheit textnäher.” For further discussions of the opposition in question, see further Christl Maier, *Die «fremde Frau» in Proverbien 1-9: Eine exegetische und sozialgeschichtliche Studie* (OBO 144; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1995); R. E. Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 600-3; R. J. Clifford, “Woman Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs,” in *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel: Festschrift N. Lohfink* (eds. G. Braulik et al.; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1993): 61-72; Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 79-126, 255-81. For two other descriptions of the Strange Woman see further Prov 22:14 and 23:27-28 and their treatment in Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 133. For a treatment of 22:14 as part of 22:6-16 see K. M. Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver: Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16* (BZAW 273; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 307-11. In relation to 22:14-15, Plöger (Otto Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* (BKAT 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 256) mentioned that the question of the straying women and the chastisement of the youth here resembles the similar allusions in Prov 1-9: “Zwar werden in der Spruchsammlung ab



Aletti, each speech by Wisdom corresponds to speeches uttered by her counterparts, e.g., the Strange Woman, Folly etc.<sup>6</sup> In Prov 9 Wisdom and Folly are placed side by side as counterparts, each providing their audience with their call.<sup>7</sup> Wisdom in Prov 1-9 makes herself accessible and available for everybody as opposed to the

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*Kap. 10 die Frauen keineswegs übergangen, aber die fremden Frauen in der Weise, wie sie uns aus der Sammlung 1-9 bekannt sind, werden nur in V. 14 und in einem ähnlich lautenden Spruch in 23,27 erwähnt, und zwar im vorliegenden Vers in einer schärferen Zuspitzung. . . . Ist die Erwähnung der fremden Frau in den Sentenzensammlungen als Seltenheit anzusehen, so wird mit dem in V. 15 angeschnittenen Thema der Erziehung (bis hin zur körperlichen Züchtigung) ein weisheitlicher Aufgabenbereich genannt, der ebenfalls in den Kapiteln 1-9 eine hervorragende Rolle spielt und auch in den Sentenzsammlungen nicht übergangen wird (vgl. 13,24; 23,13; 29,15 u.ö.).*" This position was also accepted by Heim; see Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold*, 309.

<sup>6</sup> Aletti, "Séduction," 129-44; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Aletti, "Séduction," 129-44; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 106. Concerning this on page 106 in his work Weeks commented in relation to Prov 9 that the invitation of Wisdom and Folly is issued ". . . to those who are, as yet, neither wise nor foolish." Week's next comment on page 83 of his work seems to contradict what he said earlier: "A problem is also posed by Wisdom's invitation in 9:4; she is surely not supposed to be inviting the simple to 'turn.' If the uninstructed are apparently going in the wrong direction anyway, then the bad characters seem redundant, and it is not clear how accepting the wrong sort of invitation will change anything for their victims. Conversely, if those who are invited to turn aside by Folly in 9:16 are going 'straight on the way' despite being uneducated, the role of Wisdom also seems unnecessary." So does Wisdom issue a call to the simple or uninstructed or not? I have to take issue at this point with Weeks. At this point it is enough to say that the above comments of Weeks reflect a slight deficiency in his work in terms of the way in which he failed to offer a balanced view of all the types of fools that are part of Wisdom's audience in Prov 1-9. It seems to me that his main emphasis is on the פְּתָאִים the "simple," which would be fine but no significant treatment is offered about the rest of the fools who are equally important. So it seems that he tackled the question of instruction and acquiring Wisdom only from the perspective of פְּתָאִים, which in my opinion weakens his argument. See further, Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 105-6.

aspect of inaccessibility of wisdom in Job and Qoheleth. Therefore, as Weeks has pointed out on the basis of Aletti's argumentation, for the writer of Prov 1-9 the main concern is not that wisdom is concealed ". . . *but that there are competing voices, presenting their own, false invitations.*"<sup>8</sup> Aletti has shown that the speeches occur in pairs but that they also encapsulate a major element of enticement providing the audience with the important task of choosing between them.<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 1:10-19 contains the first warning in which the son is instructed to avoid the enticements of the sinners (1:10:אִם-יִאמְרוּ).<sup>10</sup> Weeks rightly suggested that although one might not assume much from the fact that the robbers in 1:10-19 employed speech alone but the verb I פָּתָה (1:10) signals that the robbers attract their audience with what they say,<sup>11</sup> which I think is also accentuated by the expression אִם-יִאמְרוּ, which is to be found before the inception of their address (1:11). In this case the verb I פָּתָה plays a distinguished role, which in O'Connor's view belongs to a group of speech act verbs, which do not frame direct discourse.<sup>12</sup> In respect to the meaning of I פָּתָה in 1:10 and 16:29 HALOT offers the following possible meaning, namely "*to persuade someone, by offering a tempting allurements.*"<sup>13</sup> Now in respect to this clear enticement of the speech of the sinners, it is the father who has to make explicit the existing dangers. In similar fashion, in Prov 7:14-20, which comprises the Strange Woman's speech, it is the father anew who has to perform the warning.<sup>14</sup> The only "*weapons*" the characters display are their very words.<sup>15</sup> In 7:10 despite the fact that the Strange Woman wears an attractive garment (שִׁית יָגֵן) it is her speech and not her physical charms, which she employs in order to seduce the young man, "*with*

<sup>8</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 108.

<sup>9</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 130; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 136-8.

<sup>11</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81, 146.

<sup>12</sup> M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 410.

<sup>13</sup> HALOT, Vol. 2, 985.

<sup>14</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 134-8; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 129; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 80; Camp, *Wisdom*, 117.

*great persuasiveness, with the smoothness of her lips*" (7:21).<sup>16</sup> Apart from 7:21 noted by Weeks, I also want to allude to the similar admonition in 6:24 where the son is warned against the "*smooth tongue of the adulteress*."<sup>17</sup> Wisdom replies to the very attractive calls and invitations of the Strange Woman and Folly with her own calls, invitations and promises. In her first speech Wisdom admonishes, in the second speech she furnishes her credentials as proofs for the fact that it is her speeches and calls that the simple should embrace<sup>18</sup> and in her third speech she invites her audience to the magnificent banquet.

### Setting Terms, Rhetorical Apertures and Rhetorical Questions

At this stage it is important to examine some of the similarities and differences between the speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts in terms of the setting terms, and the words pertaining to the calls and the rhetorical apertures and finally to the rhetorical questions.

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<sup>16</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 80. The MT of Prov 7:21 reads:

הַשְׁתֵּנוּ בָּרַב לִקְחָהּ בְּחֵלֶק שְׂפָתֶיהָ תְּדַיְחֵנוּ.

Cf. D. Winton Thomas, "Textual and Philological Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley* (eds. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; VTSup 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 284. The term לִקְחָהּ occurs here with the meaning of "*persuasiveness*," as opposed to 16:21, where it is used for learning as the process of comprehension of the teacher's instruction, see William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1980), 489; Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, (HBAT 16; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963), 71; Helmer Ringgren, *Sprüche* (ATD 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 70; Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold*, 220, n. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 6:24 reads: לִשְׁמֹרֶךְ מֵאִשֶּׁת רָע מִחֵלֶקֶת לְשׁוֹן נִכְרִיהָ.

<sup>18</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81. I do not necessarily confer with Weeks in that Wisdom throughout struggles with the putative "*disadvantage*" in that she is unable to furnish the "*immediate rewards and gratifications*" proffered by the opposing figures. Moreover, apparently she is also unable to provide any proof apart from her very words that what she has to offer is more valuable.



It is worthwhile to show how the rhetorical apertures of Wisdom, the setting descriptions and the rhetorical questions can all be encountered in all three speeches. These aspects mark Wisdom's clear intentions concerning the issuing of public calls and invitations. Setting descriptions:<sup>19</sup> 1:20a - בְּחוּץ;<sup>20</sup> 1:20b - בְּרַחֲבוֹת; 1:21a - הַמִּיּוֹת; 8:2a - בְּרֹאשׁ-מְרוֹמִים עַל-יָרֵךְ;<sup>21</sup> 1:21b - בַּפֶּתַח; 8:2b - נֶעֱבָה; 8:3a - לְיַד-שַׁעֲרִים לְפִי-קֶרֶת;<sup>22</sup> 8:3b - מִבּוֹא פֶתָחוֹם; 9:3b - קֶרֶת - מִרְמֵי קֶרֶת.

<sup>19</sup> The words, which occur twice, are underlined.

<sup>20</sup> David-Marc D'Hamonville and Épiphanie Dumouchet, *Les Proverbes* (La Bible D'Alexandrie 17; Paris: Les Éditions Du Cerf, 2000), 164. Note how the LXX text of Prov 1:20a and 8:3b offers a "very neat" ("trèsnet") parallelism, with a "refined adjustment" ("avec une modulation raffinée"), which is not to be found in the MT: ἐν ἐξέδοις(1:20a) / ἐν εἰσδοις (8:3b), literally "at the outgoings" and "at the entrances."

<sup>21</sup> Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 79. The rabbis talked about the הַטוֹיִם אֶבֶן or "Stone of the Losers," a venue in Jerusalem from where lost and found properties were announced. This was also mentioned by Waltke ("Loser's Stone"; Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 394), when he cited Plaut's commentary.

<sup>22</sup> At the שַׁעַר. This was the very topos where Absalom stood, when he intended to offer fair judgment to the nation of Israel (2 Sam 15:2). He was standing at the שַׁעַר הַיָּרֵךְ, "next to the road of the gate," and whenever someone came along in order to present his case before the king, Absalom would call him over (קָרָא) and offer his help. Jeremiah (17:19-20) is also said to be standing at the People's Gate ([הָעָם] בְּשַׁעַר בְּנֵי-עָם) and all the gates of Jerusalem (שַׁעֲרֵי) and speak (אָמַר) to the kings and the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem who "enter the gates" (הַבָּאִים בְּשַׁעֲרֵי הָאֵלֶּה). See further Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 266; Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (IBCTP; Louisville, 2000), 140; Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 89. I would also like to mention the occurrence of שַׁעֲרִים in connection to the Valiant Woman in Prov 31:23a, 31b.

על-גפי.<sup>23</sup> The terms employed in the calls and rhetorical apertures of Wisdom betray a great deal of consistency:

1a. Rhetorical aperture (with verbs):

1:20a - תרנה

1:20b - תתן קולה

1:21a - תקרא

1:21c - תאמר

9:4b - אַמְרָהּ

8:1a - תקרא

9:3a - תקרא

8:1b - תתן קולה

8:3b - תרנה

2b. Rhetorical aperture (with nouns):

1:20b - קולה

1:21c - אַמְרִיהָ

8:1b - קולה

Concerning these rhetorical apertures and the fact that they occur frequently one could cite one of Von Rad's comments, which he used in relation to a similar wisdom text in Job 12:7-9, saying: "How many verbs there are, meaning 'speak'!"<sup>24</sup> Schäfer made a very good case when he envisaged the structure of Prov 1:20-21 and the way these "speaking" verbs function. The call of Wisdom is enacted in the following way:<sup>25</sup>

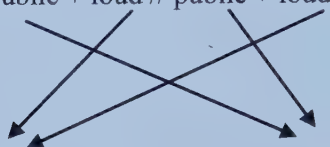
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<sup>23</sup> Concerning the way in which the setting terms function only in the first and second speeches of Wisdom, see further Gerlinde Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1-9: Traditionsgeschichtliche und theologische Studien* (FAT 16; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996, 68-70.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Woking: Xpress Reprints, 1997), 162.

<sup>25</sup> Rolf Schäfer, *Die Poesie der Weisen: Dichotomie als Grundstruktur der Lehr- und Weisheitsgedichte in Proverbien 1-9* (WMANT 77; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 42.

1:20 public + loud // public + loud



1:21 unmistakable // unavoidable

The rhetorical questions constitute a very important feature of poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible. One encounters three of these in the speeches of Wisdom and one more in the father's appeal in 5:20 and 6:9. The latter one commences with the same rhetorical question as Wisdom's appeal in 1:22a:

1:22a - עֲרֹמְתִי פִתִּים תֵּאָחֲבוּ פָתִי

8:1a - הֲלֹא־חֲכָמָה תִּקְרָא

9:4a - מִי־פָתִי יִסֵּר הָנֶה

In order to see the similarities and differences between Wisdom's calls and that of her counterparts it is necessary to take a brief look at the setting descriptions, and the terms employed in the calls and rhetorical apertures and possible rhetorical questions in relation to the counterparts of Wisdom.

With regard to the setting descriptions related to the Strange Woman, first I am listing the ones that occur also in the speeches of Wisdom: 2:18a: בַּיִת (also in 5:8b; 7:6a; 7:8b; 7:11b; 7:19a; 7:20b; in relation to Wisdom in 9:1); 5:8b: פֶּתַח (in relation to Wisdom in 1:21b; 8:3b); 7:11a: הַמִּקֵּה (in relation to Wisdom in 1:21a);<sup>26</sup> 7:12a: בַּחֲיוֹץ (in relation to Wisdom in 1:20a); 7:12a: בְּרַחֲבוֹת (in relation to Wisdom in 1:20b).

<sup>26</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 133, n. 10.



Second, I am enumerating those setting descriptions, which do not appear in relation to the speeches of Wisdom: 7:6a: חֶלֶן; 7:6b: אֶשְׁנֶב; 7:8a: בְּשֹׁק; 7:8a: פֶּנֶה (7:12b).<sup>27</sup>

Third, I am providing those setting descriptions, which occur in relation to Folly: 9:14a: פֶּתַח (in connection to the Strange Woman in 5:8b and Wisdom in 1:21b and 8:3b); 9:14a: בַּיִת (in connection to the robbers in 1:13b, the Strange Woman in 5:8b; 7:6a; 7:8b; 7:11b; 7:19a; 7:20b and Wisdom in 9:1); 9:14b: מְרוֹם (in connection to Wisdom in 8:2b and 9:3a); 9:14b: קֶרֶת (in connection to Wisdom in 8:3a and 9:3b). In two cases one encounters recurring setting expressions such as פֶּתַח בֵּיתָה in 5:8b (Strange Woman) and in 9:14a (Folly), then מְרוֹם קֶרֶת in 9:3b (Wisdom) and 9:14b (Folly). Regarding the terms highlighting the rhetorical apertures and the calls of the robbers, the Strange Woman and Folly it is evident that except one term (1:10a: פֶּתַח) all the others occur in relation to Wisdom's speeches: 1:11a: אֶמֶר (in relation to the robbers); 2:16b: אֶמְרִיהָ (in relation to the Strange Woman); 7:13b: אֶמֶר (in relation to the Strange Woman); 9:15a: קְרָא (in relation to Folly) and 9:16b: אֶמֶר (in relation to Folly). In connection to the "words" of the Strange Woman in 2:16b one cannot help but think about the "words" of Wisdom in 1:21c. However, 1:21c was regarded by some scholars as superfluous.<sup>28</sup> I think however, that 1:21c and especially the term

<sup>27</sup> The latter term occurs with אֶצֶל, "beside," in Prov 7:8a, 12b. Just as the Strange Woman is beside the corners of the streets in 7:8a, 12b in 8:30 Wisdom is "beside" God. See further Aletti, "Séduction," 134, n. 12; Jean-Noël Aletti, "Proverbes 8,22-31. Étude de structure," *Bib* 57 (1976), 26; Gale A. Yee, "An Analysis of Prov 8 22-31 According to Style and Structure," *ZAW* 94 (1982), 60. The expression שָׁם אָנִי, "I was there" in 8:27a is in intimate semantic connection with וְאֶחָדָהּ אֶצְלוֹ אֶמֶן, "I was beside him, a darling child" in 8:30a.

<sup>28</sup> Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 22, 30. In Toy's view בָּעִיר אֶמְרִיהָ, spoils the rhythm and it seems to be a gloss, in which בָּעִיר was meant to explicate שְׁעָרִים, asseverating that "the gateways" in question are certainly that of a city, whereas אֶמְרִיהָ makes it clearer that the

“words” (אִמְרֵיהָ) of Wisdom should receive a more positive appraisal in light of the fact that it may parallel the “words” (אִמְרֵיהָ) of the Strange Woman in 2:16b.

Fourth, there is only one rhetorical question occurring in relation to one of Wisdom’s counterparts, namely Folly in 9:16, which is technically exactly the same in its wording as Wisdom’s rhetorical question in 9:4. As it becomes clear in terms of the words used for the description of the setting, the terms used in relation to the calls and rhetorical apertures of Wisdom and of her counterparts and the rhetorical questions, there is indeed a great deal of affinity and one must concur with Aletti and Weeks that even in these respects it is hard to differentiate between these competing speeches. Moreover, the idea of likeness in terms of Wisdom’s address and her counterparts is not only signalled by the exact similarity of Wisdom’s and Folly’s rhetorical questions (9:4; 9:16), which is the pinnacle of these affinities in terms of address but by other examples as well.<sup>29</sup> The inviting imperative of the verb הִלֵּךְ occurs at the

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following words are that of Wisdom. Bickell obliterated תֹּאמַר and שְׁעָרִים, which are required by the connection, and replaced בָּעִיר with אִמְרֵיהָ. Toy deemed that the two terms, which should rather be omitted and taken as glosses are בָּעִיר and אִמְרֵיהָ. The conclusion is that the Versions, apart from the LXX, are in accordance, with insignificant differences, with the MT, and the glosses ought to have been early, so said Toy. See further R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 18; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 34. Scott omitted תֹּאמַר אִמְרֵיהָ. See further McKane, *Proverbs*, 272. McKane also approached 1:21 negatively, when he said that the second half of the verse seems to be “too long.” See further Plöger, *Sprüche*, 13. In Plöger’s view, Prov 1:21, when compared with 8:1-3 seems overloaded, although he did not deny that it may well be a long verse with a tricola as in 1:22-23 and 1:27. He deemed that a change in the construction of שְׁעָרִים, is not necessary. It should be compared with the adjectival usage in Isa 22:2.

<sup>29</sup> Aletti, “Sédution,” 133. Without noticing at the time that Aletti called this example “*le plus net*” (“*neatest*”) I labelled the example in question “*the pinnacle*” in terms of the affinities. Another example of resemblance is to be found between Prov 5:19 and 7:18 (also on page 135 in Aletti’s

inception of the invitation issued by the robbers in 1:10a (לִבָּה אֶתְנוּ), by the Strange Woman in 7:18a (לִבָּה נַרְוָה) and by Wisdom in 9:5 (לִבְנוּ לַחֲמוּנִי).

I agree with Aletti and Weeks in that the speeches are paired, that they all encapsulate an element of enticement. Furthermore, there are competing voices, which issue their false invitations and the only weapons the speakers have are their words. I would, however, like to highlight the fact that there are certain differences.<sup>30</sup> I concur concerning the similarities between these competing voices and that is the main reason why I have examined the actual calls, rhetorical apertures and rhetorical questions of the characters in order to highlight this. Recognizing the affinities is essential but one must not overlook the differences. I think these differences between the speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts may be grouped under two points: 1. Differences pertaining to the way in which Wisdom reveals herself or presents herself to the public, and 2. Differences concerning what Wisdom and Prov 1-9 generally expects the addressed public to do if Wisdom's call is accepted. I shall expand the first point as Wisdom's self-revelation, whereas the second point is discussed under four headings, which are: 1. To call out for insight and to raise the voice for understanding in Prov 2:3, 2. To seek and search for understanding in 2:4, 3. To love Wisdom and

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article). When Aletti talked about the similarities between the speeches of Wisdom and her counterparts, he said: "*L'exemple le plus net, parce que stylistiquement marquée, se trouve en Prov. ix où dame Sagesse et dame Insensée dissent l'une et l'autre: 'que celui qui est inexpérimenté se détourne par ici!'*" (versets 4 et 15)." Aletti did not mention anything about the rhetorical questions or their importance, which I discussed above. He simply mentioned that Wisdom and Folly say the same thing in Prov 9:4 and 9:15. In his article, there might be a mistake in the listing of 9:15 because the pairing question of Folly is in 9:16 and not in 9:15. Cf. Schäfer, *Poesie*, 248. Schäfer made a good case by highlighting the similar invitations in 9:4 and 9:16 in his outline of the structure of Prov 9.

<sup>30</sup> Aletti, "Séduction," 142. However, to be fair to Aletti by the end of his article he did tackle what the speech of Wisdom has to offer "*au contraire*" to her counterparts.



not to forsake her (4:6), 4. And to call Wisdom “*my sister*” and insight “*intimate friend*” (7:4). As I will make it clear these four headings represent four tasks, which those who internalize the instruction are asked to perform in relation to Wisdom but not in relation to any of Wisdom’s counterparts. I think that these differences between Wisdom and her counterparts are substantial in terms of the actual process of distinguishing between the competing voices.

## The Self-Revelation of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9

As shown above the settings of Wisdom’s speeches seem to be important because of the common ideas they employ (1:20-21; 8:1-3; 9:3-4). In Wisdom’s House, i.e., Prov 1-9, all three speeches of Wisdom encapsulate apertures or introits, which I may also be inclined to call “*oratorical or rhetorical apertures*.” This aspect of structural “*Form*” might fulfil many purposes, out of which one is fairly evident, namely that this “*.. . all-embracing, eloquent, veracious and elevated wisdom*,”<sup>31</sup> calls and speaks in a public fashion so that everybody could hear what Wisdom has to say and share from her fullness and perfection. This public fashion is in opposition to some features related to the Strange Woman and Folly. As much as both the Strange Woman and Folly appear in public places one cannot avoid missing certain verses in relation to these characters, which point not to publicity but to its antonym, namely hiding or concealment as in 7:9,<sup>32</sup> 18-19 and 9:17. Therefore, the structural “*Form*” of the introductory part sets the scene of Wisdom’s appearance, which is not secretive or hidden but public through and through.<sup>33</sup> Weeks has rightly pointed out that the problem of the

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<sup>31</sup>Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, (HBAT 16; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963), 22. This is Gemser’s definition. He wrote: “*allumfassende, lautere, wahrhaftige und höchste Weisheit*.” See further McKane, *Proverbs*, 272. The translation was that of McKane.

<sup>32</sup>The expression בֶּאֱשֵׁן, “*pupil(of the eye)*,” in Prov 7:9 also occurs in 20:20b. Cf. Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold*, 281.

<sup>33</sup>Aletti, “*Séduction*,” 142. As opposed to the “*projet secret*” of the seductress.

wisdom writer in Prov 1:20-1; 8:1-3 and 9:3-4 “... *is not that wisdom is hidden, but that there are competing voices, presenting their own, false invitations.*”<sup>34</sup> As signified by the “*setting*” terms and expressions, Wisdom is present at the busiest thoroughfares of ancient Israelite city-life.


Having set the context in which Wisdom calls and invites it is now useful to examine how Wisdom attempts to reveal herself to the audience targeted in her speech and to inculcate her instruction in the mind of the uninstructed. In all three speeches of Wisdom the voice, which calls and invites humankind and speaks to them as a voice revealed. I feel this aspect automatically leads to the feature of the “*self-revelation*” of Wisdom. The feature I am alluding to is somewhat connected to the treatment of von Rad entitled “*The Self-Revelation of Creation.*”<sup>35</sup> The main question is that how does Wisdom reveal herself through her calls and invitations? Each speech of Wisdom has a section concerned directly with the act of call on the part of Wisdom (Prov 1:20-22; 8:1, 4; 9:3). It is fairly lucid what is intended here, i.e., Wisdom calls to humankind. In Von Rad’s interpretation of the self-revelation of creation Wisdom’s call to men represents a seminal event: “*The facts are clear. Wisdom . . . calls to men. And this brings us at last to the event which is the real subject of the didactic poem. And what an event it is! In this call we are dealing with the very opposite of something private and personal or even esoteric, which would be accessible only to initiates.*”<sup>36</sup>

The public character of Wisdom’s call is evident. Wisdom speaks at the most profane public venues. Wisdom’s intention is to proffer instruction and a release from stupidity (1:22). The audience is asked to learn from her and to listen to her (8:5; 10:32). Wisdom teaches intelligence and truth (8:5, 7). She is promising wealth, honour and righteousness (8:18, 21) and also life (8:35), divine favour (8:35) and even security (1:33). Wisdom, i.e., חֵכְמוֹת, if taken as a plural, as Gemser explicated, is a plural form of extension, intensity, and

<sup>34</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 108, 120.

<sup>35</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 144-176. See also Waltke, *Proverbs*, 78-80.

<sup>36</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 158.

majesty, which could be taken as a tribute to the “... *all-embracing, eloquent, veracious and elevated wisdom.*”<sup>37</sup> In relation to this point Wisdom becomes an “*Offenbarungsmittlerin*” or a “*revelation-mediator*.”<sup>38</sup> Of course the way von Rad envisaged Wisdom being a “*revelation-mediator*” was through creation, which is a very important point. Wisdom seems to want to validate her calls, invitations and offers, with magnificent displays of her role in creation (Prov 3:13-20; 8:22-31). Wisdom’s call is a cosmic invitation into her cosmic house, which she has built with such artistry in Prov 8:22-36 and 9:1-2. Wisdom’s connection to creation brings the final and most important seal on the public character of her calls and invitations. However, as shown by her “*chiding speech*”/“*Scheltrede*” and “*threat speech*”/“*Drohrede*” in Prov 1:24-31, Wisdom’s revelation does not mean that she becomes available at the whim of anyone like a constantly flowing “*well of truth.*”<sup>39</sup> Wisdom is perfectly entitled to pull back from her audience when she experiences that she is not hearkened to in the way she should be.<sup>40</sup> Wisdom’s clarity is heard through her own voice retaining the marks of a divine address. It can be heard everywhere, it is not possible to avoid it. Moreover, similar to God, Wisdom calls for a decision between matters that concern life and death. Von Rad went as far as saying that the gifts Wisdom promises are “*gifts of salvation.*” At this point, von Rad underscored a difficulty, namely that this  who can speak apart from God, can say to her audience

<sup>37</sup> Gemser, *Sprüche*, 22. Gemser wrote: “... *die allumfassende, lautere, wahrhaftige und höchste Weisheit.*” See further McKane, *Proverbs*, 272. The translation provided above is that of McKane.

<sup>38</sup>C. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9: Eine Form- und Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter Einbeziehung Ägyptischen Vergleichsmaterials* (WMANT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966), 127, 128, 128, n. 2. The term “*Offenbarungsmittlerin*” was borrowed by Kayatz from von Rad. Kayatz wrote: “*Das führt dazu, daß die Weisheit in göttlicher Autorität spricht, daß sie als ‘Offenbarungsmittlerin’ auftritt.*” Translation: “*This leads to [the fact] that Wisdom speaks with divine authority, appearing as a revelation-mediator.*”

<sup>39</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 161.

<sup>40</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 161.

that “*Whoever finds me, finds life*” (Prov 3:18; 8:35; 9:6; Sir 4:12)? Neither a prophet nor the Strange Woman and Folly can summon an audience in the way Wisdom has.<sup>41</sup> All those who do not hearken to her call are doomed to destruction. This calling voice, when disobeyed, can be withdrawn and made unavailable as exemplified by Wisdom’s first speech (1:20-33). Now, my point here is not to argue in support of von Rad’s view concerning the existence of a primeval word-order.<sup>42</sup> I simply want to draw attention to the character of Wisdom’s calls and how these calls resemble that of God in the Hebrew Bible and how they surpass in some points the calls of her counterparts in Prov 1-9. By this, as I said above, I also want to draw attention to the fact that Aletti and Weeks were far too quick in asserting that the similarities between the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts are decisive in terms of the difficulties faced by the audience in the process of choosing between the competing voices. I concur with both scholars in relation to the resemblances of these calls and invitations and that the audience finds it hard to distinguish between them. However, the existing affinities should not hinder one from seeing the differences between these calls and invitations. As much as one would like to see the equality of the competing voices at least in terms of the main aspects

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<sup>41</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 163. I do not intend to explicate this problem in the way a good number of scholars have, namely that the fact that Wisdom has a separate voice means that one should postulate the existence of an “*ugly ditch*” between Wisdom and God. Moreover, I do not intend either to explain this problem in the light of the dichotomy of the alleged secular and religious Israelite wisdom traditions. In my opinion, as it is briefly shown here, there are too many similarities between the “*Ich-Stil*” addressed by Wisdom and that by God, thus to draw out significant discrepancies between the two might be a possible but somewhat forced task. The fact that Wisdom’s “*Ich-Rede*” in Prov 1:20-33; 8:1-36 and 9:1-6 is so similar to that of God’s in the Hebrew Bible is more likely to point to the superiority of the latter above the former and not the other way round. See further Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 76-98; Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 283-303.

<sup>42</sup> For an evaluation of Von Rad’s treatment see further F.-J. Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels – ein Fremdkörper im Alten Testament? Eine untersuchung zum Buch der Sprüche auf dem Hintergrund der ägyptischen Weisheitslehren* (FThSt 143; Freiburg, 1990), 274.



such as the reasons why the audience finds it hard to distinguish between them I think that there is a difference between the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts not only in terms of Wisdom's self-revelation but also in terms of what Wisdom actually says to the audience. For instance after reading 1:24-31, i.e., the "*chiding speech*" and "*threat speech*" ("*Scheltrede*" / "*Drohrede*") of Wisdom one could hardly postulate that the audience finds it hard to distinguish in this case between the chiding and threatening voice of Wisdom and the smooth lips of the Strange Woman. I think that Wisdom seems to be able to afford the luxury of lashing out against her audience as opposed to her counterparts. However, the luxury is not so much on the part of Wisdom. Seemingly Wisdom will not lose out by not being enticing enough towards the audience just like the Strange Woman and Folly.<sup>43</sup> Those who cannot afford the luxury of not internalizing Wisdom's instruction are those who are addressed. Proverbs 1:24-31 clearly shows that the loss of Wisdom's voice (1:28a) will have catastrophic consequences. The audience will remain on its own having to live by their "*own initiative*," which will result in their doom: "*Even if they then come to realize that they need to be thus addressed to be able to live at all, then this voice will remain silent for them.*"<sup>44</sup> Wisdom can afford her voice to be silent as opposed to the other characters that cannot. She can be distant when she wants, not so her counterparts. Wisdom can remain in the house

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<sup>43</sup>Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 327. The situation might change slightly if one would accept Fox's view about the, allegedly, logical order of the speeches of Wisdom. The three speeches of Wisdom, alongside with Prov 3:13-20 and 6:1-19 were docketed by Fox as the "*wisdom interludes*." Interlude A being 1:20-33, interlude B being 3:13-20, interlude C being 6:1-19, interlude D being 8:1-36, whereas interlude E being 9:1-6, 11, 13-18. He highlighted that: "*The logical sequence of the interludes, which a single author would likely have followed, is E-D-A.*" Therefore, I think this sequence would mean that Wisdom does not have any luxuries in terms of being able to threaten her audience. Moreover, this way she would keep her bitter judgment until the end, just as the Strange Woman and Folly proffer the bitter results of the allegiance manifested towards them after the various fools performed their affairs with them.

<sup>44</sup> Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 161.

(9:1-2) and send her envoys (9:3), which Folly does not seem to be able to do. As I noted above, the Strange Woman and Folly, who both seem to appear in similar public settings just as Wisdom, still betray a great deal of darkness and concealment about them, about what they say and intend to do (7:9, 18-19 and 9:17).<sup>45</sup> I think that even the frequent allusions to Sheol or the dead in the case of the robbers, the Strange Woman and Folly heighten this element of darkness (1:12; 2:18-19; 5:5-6; 7:27; 9:18).<sup>46</sup>

So to return to the second point of the examination how does Wisdom intend to inculcate her instruction in the mind of the audience? I would suggest that Wisdom plans to inculcate her instruction by revealing herself in a way in which she is unquestionably proving her superior knowledge about the paths of life, i.e., she reveals herself in a way in which she becomes convincing in terms of what she “*knows*” as opposed to the Strange Woman and Folly. There are pointers in Prov 1-9, which show that the Strange Woman and Folly do not seem to realize that their paths or houses sink into Sheol or go down to the dead. Proverbs 5:6 makes it clear “*mot à mot*” that the Strange Woman does not know (לֹא תָדַע) that her ways wander and 9:18 states the same thing about Folly that she does not know (וְלֹא-יָדַעַת) that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol. In opposition to this, Wisdom knows about paths of life and where they lead. Her expertise about the paths of life should be convincing enough that she knows what she is talking about. Wisdom intends to inculcate the instruction by offering this knowledge, this insight about the paths of life, good paths and bad ones alike. As Waltke put it “*Wisdom is inseparable from knowledge.*”<sup>47</sup> The “*son*” is encouraged on several occasions to know wisdom (1:2a) understand words of insight (1:2b: בִּינָה), to call out for insight (2:3a), then he will understand the fear of the Lord

<sup>45</sup> Aletti, “Séduction,” 134. Aletti rightfully asked in relation to Prov 7:14-20 and the Strange Woman’s activity: “*Quedoit-on faire quand la nuit est tombée?*”

<sup>46</sup> By this I do not mean that all elements of “*hiding*” are negative in Prov 1-9. There are “*hidden treasures*” for instance in Prov 2:4.

<sup>47</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs*, 77.

(2:5a) and find knowledge of God (2:5b), which are the most precious gifts of Wisdom.<sup>48</sup> Then again the son will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path (2:9) because wisdom will come into his heart and knowledge will be pleasant to his soul (2:10). I would like to note the important verses in Prov 3:19-20 in relation to Wisdom and divine creation and 24:3-4 in connection to Wisdom and human “creation,” i.e., house-building and house-filling. This process of divine and human creation is described with the tripartite formula בְּדַעְתּוֹ, בַּחֲבוּנָה, בַּחֲכָמָה and Wisdom, understanding and knowledge are what Wisdom promotes in contrast to the lack of knowledge of the Strange Woman and Folly. Wisdom dwells in prudence (8:12a) and finds knowledge and discretion (8:12b), she has sound wisdom and insight (8:14). Wisdom’s words are straight to the one who understands (8:9a) and right to those who find knowledge (8:9b). This is the expertise that Wisdom has to offer to the audience and by this she intends to inculcate her instruction.

In the above section I attempted to examine the similarities and contrasts between the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts. I did this in order to show that the assumption according to which the audience found it hard to differentiate the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts because the calls are so alike, is only one part of the whole picture. I suggested that beside the affinities the differences have to be recognized as well. Wisdom in her calls in

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<sup>48</sup> Gemser, *Sprüche*, 25. Gemser made a good case by noting that these parallel concepts, i.e., wisdom, knowledge, understanding etc. betray an intimate and personal contact and not a dry intellectual one: “*Von den Gaben der Weisheit wird die kostbarste, die Jahwefurcht, die Gotteserkenntnis genannt (5); die Paralellsetzung dieser Begriffe zeigt, daß mit ‘Erkenntnis’ nicht etwas rein Intellektuelles gemeint ist, sondern eine Vertrautheit, die aus persönlichem Verkehr entsteht (bei Hosea steht der ‘Erkenntnis’ parallel ‘Liebe und Treue’ 4 1 6 6).*” I think that this personal contact in connection to Wisdom is actually related to the aspect of trust and faith, which was usually mistakenly labelled irrelevant by von Rad but appraised positively by Waltke. See further Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 191 and Waltke, *Proverbs*, 82-3.



contrast to her counterparts does not betray any element of such concealment that is to be encountered in the calls of her counterparts. In her public calls she reveals herself and her purpose is to impart this knowledge just the way the robbers intend to share the booty, the Strange Woman her gratifications and Folly her stolen water and secret bread (9:17). Moreover, Wisdom, as opposed to her counterparts, can afford to be distant or silent. The audience may also be able to distinguish between the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts on the basis of their expectations. The robbers want the son to take part in the process of thievery (1:11-14), the Strange Woman invites her prey to take fill of love till morning (7:18a) and Folly offers the partaking in bread and water (9:17). Nevertheless, the audience is required to perform something more elevated, intimate and lasting in the case of Wisdom than a night's encounter. The audience is expected to enact four things: 1. To call out for insight and to raise the voice for understanding in Prov 2:3, 2. To seek understanding like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures in 2:4, 3. To love Wisdom and not to forsake her (4:6), 4. And to call Wisdom "*my sister*" and insight "*intimate friend*" (7:4).

## The Expectations of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9

It has been suggested that the "*son*" in Prov 1-9 is not supposed to be capable of differentiating between the desirable offers of Wisdom and the perilous invitations, the "*perverse speech*" of the opposing figures. If this is the case, then of course this elevates the importance of the instruction offered by the father and Wisdom. Apparently, the author of Prov 1-9 advances this point so far that he employs in some ways a similar imagery and word-stock for both of the female figures, e.g., they can both be "*embraced*" (חָבַד; 4:8; 5:20).<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in 7:21 the seductions of the Strange Woman are called her חֲכָמָה,<sup>50</sup> literally her "*instructions*," word employed by the father in

<sup>49</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 132-3; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81. See further Gale Yee, "I Have Perfumed my Bed with Myrrh": The Foreign Woman ('iššâ zarâ) in Proverbs 1-9,' *JSOT* 43 (1989): 53-68.

<sup>50</sup> Aletti, "Sédution," 133; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 399. The verb retains an educational nuance of accepting what is true (Prov 1:5; 2:1; 24:32) or false



his teaching in 4:2, not being used negatively anywhere else.<sup>51</sup> Aletti pointed out that the final aim of all these aspects is to stress that the crux eventuated by the bad figures is not really the seduction to perform evil things but the acknowledgment of what is wrong thus compelling their listeners to differentiate between true and false speech.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, the individual is unable to perform a choice either between the offers of Wisdom or between that of the sinners only on the basis of shallow looks. What is expected is a well-informed and intelligent comprehension of the situation and the outcomes<sup>53</sup> (thus the emphasis on instruction). Following the reasoning of Aletti, Weeks agreed that the state of opposition between Wisdom and the Strange Woman is not maintained only to prove the superiority of the former. Wisdom, the Strange Woman and Folly target the simple, the uninstructed with their speeches (1:22a; 7:7; 8:5; 9:4, 16). The safeguard against the woman is provided only if the instruction is hearkened to (2:1-22; 5:1-6; 6:20-4; 7:1-5). The main idea is that only those who are instructed are able to differentiate between true and perverted speech, so the opposition or contrast in question finds its main fulfilment in this stress on instruction throughout Prov 1-9.<sup>54</sup> Naturally, as Newsom has pointed out, this may be formulated more negatively by saying that Prov 1-9 strives to establish the hegemony of its own discourse. As soon as the discourse of Prov 1-9 is hearkened to, one is guarded from “other

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(6:25; 7:21; 22:24-25) and not “.. . developing an independent critical faculty. Whatever you take takes you.”

<sup>51</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Aletti, “Séduction,” 133. Aletti wrote: “*Toutefois l’ambiguïté est fondamentalement causée par la situation du locuteur. Deux personnes pouvant proposer les mêmes choses; mais l’une veut le mal et l’autre le bien. Dès lors, comment les reconnaître? Là peut se glisser plus facilement la séduction de la parole: la plus grande séduction ne consiste-t-elle pas à inviter au mal avec (presque) les mêmes paroles que celui qui appelle au bien?*” Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Aletti, “Séduction,” 133-44; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 81-2.

<sup>54</sup> Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 82.

voices.”<sup>55</sup> I think that the intention of Prov 1-9 can be extended beyond the confines of this main idea of contrast postulated by Weeks on the lines of Aletti’s findings. The uninstructed are quite convincingly called not only to differentiate between the two competing voices but also to “embrace” either Wisdom or the Strange Woman. Nevertheless, as I pointed out above, as much as the calls of Wisdom and that of her counterparts retain great affinities and thus it is hard for the audience to distinguish between the competing voices, one must not overlook the fact that there are certain differences between the calls. Therefore, I think that the audience in Prov 1-9 is called to something more in relation to Wisdom than just to hear her call and to “embrace” her. The son is conditioned to enact four additional things in relation to Wisdom: 1. To call out for insight and to raise the voice for understanding in Prov 2:3, 2. To seek understanding like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasure in 2:4, 3. To love Wisdom and not to forsake her (4:6), 4. And to call Wisdom “my sister” and insight “intimate friend” (7:4).<sup>56</sup> These are aspects, which are not characterized by the same element of contrast, since neither the Strange Woman nor Folly bid the uninstructed to call for them or to love them and not leave them or even to call them “sister” or “intimate friend.” The furthest the Strange Woman goes, is the invitation to her prey to enjoy love until the morning (7:18a: לָכֶּה נִקְחָה דְּרִים).

(וְנִתְעַלְסָה בְּאַהֲבִים) and to delight themselves with love (7:18b: עֲדֵה-הֶבְקֵר). The same reciprocity of love however, is not as emphatically required by the Strange Woman as it is by Wisdom in 8:17. These four aspects to which the audience of Wisdom is conditioned are related to the actual calls of Wisdom, which provide further credentials as to why her voice should be heeded. The four aspects I suggested are somewhat connected to Kayatz’s treatment concerned

<sup>55</sup> C. A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989): 147.

<sup>56</sup> The expression “my sister” (which relates to point three) can also be found in Cant 4:9-10, 12 and 5:1-2. This expression and usage is well-known from such passages as Gen 12:13, 19; 20:2, 5, 12; 26:7, 9.



with the love of and for Wisdom and that of von Rad's "*Intellectual Love*" in which both expand the reasons for the presence of the motif of love-language in Prov 1-9, surmising that Wisdom not only addresses humankind but also loves them.<sup>57</sup> According to 4:6 humankind should love Wisdom, which is a role-reversal. This role-reversal is underscored by my first point proposed, according to which it is not just Wisdom who calls to her audience but the audience is also conditioned to call for Wisdom (2:3) and to seek her and search for her (2:4).

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<sup>57</sup> Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 98-102; Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 166.